AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

Please amend claims 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7 and 12 as shown below. Please add new claims 13-16. The following listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Complete Listing of Claims:

- 1. (Currently Amended) A method for applying a coating to an item a copper or copper alloy item, the coating consisting in major part of a combination of zinc and chromium, characterized by exposing the item to an aqueous solution comprising effective amounts of hydroxyl ions (OH), Zn-containing ions, and Cr-containing ions and of rubidium ions (Rb⁺) in major part valence balancing the OH.
- 2. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1 A method for applying a coating to an item, the coating consisting in major part of a combination of zinc and chromium, characterized by exposing the item to an aqueous solution comprising effective amounts of hydroxyl ions (OH'), Zn-containing ions, and Cr-containing ions and of rubidium ions (Rb⁺) in major part valence balancing the OH', wherein [:] the amount of Rb⁺ is in excess of combined amounts of Na⁺ and K⁺ in the solution; and the Cr-containing ions are present in major part as Cr(VI) ions.
- 3. (Currently Amended) The method of claim [1] 2 wherein:

the amount of Rb is in excess of combined amounts of other alkali metals in the solution.

- 4. (Currently Amended) The method of claim [1] 2 wherein the solution has a pH of at most 13.0.
- 5. (Original) The method of claim 4 wherein the solution has a pH of between 11.0 and 13.0.

6. (Currently Amended) A method for coating an item characterized by: exposing the item to an aqueous solution comprising effective amounts of:

hydroxyl ions (OH');

one or more ions of alkali metals, alkaline earth metals, or a combination thereof other than Na, to in major part valence balance the OH;

Zn-containing ions; and

Cr-containing ions; and

applying a current to the through the item effective to plate exposed portions of the item with a coating consisting in major part of a combination of Zn and Cr codeposited with a flake-like morphology.

- 7. (Currently Amended) A coated item manufactured by the method of claim [1] 6.
- 8. (Original) A method for treating a metallic surface comprising: exposing the surface to an aqueous solution comprising effective amounts of Rb⁺, hydroxyl ions (OH), Zn-containing ions and Cr-containing ions; running a current through the surface so as to plate the surface with a coating consisting in major part of a combination of zinc and chromium.
- 9. (Original) The method of claim 8 wherein:

a step of providing the solution comprises introducing the Rb⁺ in the solution as RbOH;

the amount of Rb^+ is in excess of combined amounts of Na^+ and K^+ in the solution; and

the Cr in the Cr-containing ions is present in major part as Cr(VI) ions.

10. (Original) An aqueous electroplating solution for the codeposition of zinc and chromium comprising effective amounts of:

hydroxyl ions (OH');

one or more ions of alkali metals, alkaline earth metals, or a combination thereof other than Na and K, to in major part valence balance the OH;

Zn-containing ions; and

Cr-containing ions.

- 11. (Original) The solution of claim 10 consisting essentially of a solution of:
 - 5-1300 g/l RbOH;
 - 0.1-125 g/l ZnO; and
 - 0.1-50 g/l Na₂Cr₂O₇•2H₂O.
- 12. (Currently Amended) The solution of claim 11 further comprising an amount of ammonium hexafluorosilicate effective to stabilize the solution so as to substantially prevent zinc hydroxide precipitation over a period of at least 3 days about 4 days.
- 13. (New) The method of claim 1, wherein the amount of Rb⁺ is in excess of combined amounts of Na⁺ and K⁺ in the solution; and the Cr-containing ions are present in major part as Cr(VI) ions.
- 14. (New) The method of claim 1 wherein:

the amount of Rb is in excess of combined amounts of other alkali metals in the solution.

- 15. (New) The method of claim 1 wherein the solution has a pH of at most 13.0.
- 16. (New) The method of claim 15 wherein the solution has a pH of between 11.0 and 13.0.